

HEPATITIS C: THE BASICS

Arizona Department of Corrections
Health Service Bureau

Inmate Wellne1ss Program
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What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Your liver is responsible for many important body functions. It processes the foods you eat, filters out drugs and poisons, and stores vitamins, minerals, and sugars.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease caused by a virus called the hepatitis C virus, or HCV. There is no vaccine to protect against HCV. The virus is spread by **blood-to-blood contact**. Blood-to-blood means an infected persons blood must come into direct contact with someone else's blood, for example through a break in the skin that the infected blood enters, such as by sharing needles.

Many people with HCV have no symptoms and lead normal lives. In fact, 15-20% of those infected will naturally "clear" the virus, and not develop a chronic disease. However, some people can develop serious health problems, especially after 10, 20, or 30 years. It can cause an ongoing (chronic) infection of the liver. Chronic HCV may lead to cirrhosis (liver damage), liver failure, and liver cancer.

What are the symptoms?

Most people with HCV will never have any symptoms. If you do experience symptoms, they may resemble the flu: fatigue, itching, joint pain, appetite loss, nausea/vomiting, and soreness/tenderness in the right part of the abdomen under the ribs.

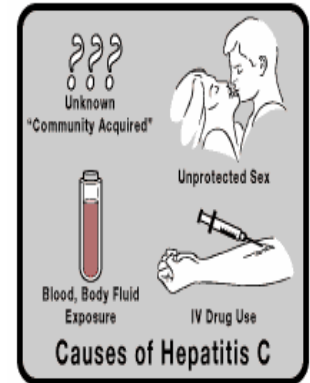
When first infected, some people may develop symptoms such as their urine becomes very dark and the whites of their eyes and skin turn yellow.

The symptoms may disappear within a few weeks, but this does not mean the infection has also disappeared. If you notice these symptoms, submit an HNR as soon as possible!

How can I avoid catching HCV?

There is no vaccine to protect you. The only way is to avoid risky behaviors.

- *Don't share items used to prepare or administer drugs (needle, cooker, cotton, fit, tie and water, cocaine straws, or crack pipes).*



- *Don't share personal items like razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, or earrings.*
- *Don't share tattooing or body piercing equipment.*
- *Cover open sores or wounds.*

Anything that exposes you to the blood of others is risky, for example:

- *Fights between inmates.*
- *Touching clothing, beds and sheets contaminated with blood.*
- *Having sex (oral or anal).*
- *Getting a tattoo while in prison.*
- *Cleaning up blood without gloves.*

What if I Already Have It?

Even if you have been informed that you have HCV, with proper care you can still lead a healthy, normal life! Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, get plenty of rest and avoid drugs and especially alcohol. Follow the advice and recommendations of your doctor.